

16 January 2022

How-to China: US expat in Beijing looks forward to the Winter Olympics

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<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202201/16/WS61e351a6a310cdd39bc81475.html>

Editor's Note: The eyes of the world are turning to China. In this ongoing series How-to China, we tell stories about how Chinese approaches promote understanding, solve problems and improve the lives of people around the globe.



interview video (4 minutes, Chinese with English subtitles)

With the 2022 Winter Olympics approaching, Terry Crossman, who has lived in Beijing for over two decades, shared his own experience of winter sports and extended his best wishes to the Games.

Born and raised in New York, the 66-year-old American has lived in Beijing for 26 years. Crossman was captivated by Chinese culture from childhood and has been a public security volunteer in Beijing's Xicheng district since 2017. He found it fun to be a Xicheng Dama, a nickname for public security volunteers who are usually elderly women, in the district. His Chinese name is Gao Tianrui and he prefers to be called "Lao Gao" (In China, using Lao before the surname of a person indicates familiarity).

In an interview with China Daily, Crossman showed our reporters the area he hangs out and talked about his impressions of Beijing residents and his childhood experience of ice and snow sports.

The following are excerpts from the interview:

Q: How did you come up with the idea to become a volunteer for the Xicheng district in Beijing?

Crossman: I'm 66 years old, and will soon turn 67. I've lived in Beijing for 26 years.

My major in college was Chinese history and philosophy, and I lived in Hong Kong and Singapore before settling down in Beijing.

In 2017, after living in Shichahai, a scenic spot area in downtown Beijing, for six years, I got to know some locals and was invited by them to become a volunteer for the region.

It seems that I was the only foreign volunteer and I like to be called a Xicheng Dama because I think being a member of them is fun.

Work at the volunteer service booth entails showing lost travelers the way or giving them a glass of water.



Terry Crossman is on duty in the volunteer box at the Lotus Market in the Shichahai area, Xicheng district, Beijing, on April 20, 2018. [Photo by Du Lianyi/China Daily]



Terry Crossman directs tourists at the Lotus Market in the Shichahai area, Xicheng district, Beijing, on April 20, 2018. [Photo by Du Lianyi/China Daily]

Q: What are your impressions of people in Beijing?

Crossman:

I have got used to living in Beijing. I believe it's quite convenient to live in Beijing and I can eat all kinds of food.

Another thought I have in Beijing is the internationalization of the city. Both Beijing and Shanghai are very international cities.

Though I live in a metropolis, I'm close to nature. There are trees, birds, and even yellow weasels in my neighborhood.



Terry Crossman eats noodles at a local restaurant in the Shichahai area, Xicheng district, Beijing, on April 20, 2018. [Photo by Du Lianyi/China Daily]

Q: Have you ever experienced ice and snow sports before and how did you become involved in the winter sports?

Crossman:

I grew up in the suburbs of New York with four younger brothers. On Saturdays, our mother used to drive us to an ice rink in a van. Then we played in the children's ice hockey team there. So I played ice hockey from the time I was in fourth grade in elementary school until my second year at junior high school. Later I joined the ski team in high school because I was also good at skiing.

I can do two kinds of skiing: One is sliding down the mountain, which is great since I like the feel of freedom as one is skiing down a mountain.

Cross-country skiing is also my thing. I like it very much because it brings you to a quiet nature and there're no other people around you. Pine trees in the forest are covered with snow.

I believe it's fantastic and I would love to do some cross-country skiing again.

Q: How do you view the development of ice and snow sports in China?

Crossman:

I have met some promising 14-year-old kids playing in ice hockey teams in China. Some of them have gone to the United States for study and they wish to play in the National Hockey League there.

I think it's a wonderful dream. Maybe I can live to see a "Yao Ming" in ice hockey.

About the Olympics, the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing were marvelous. I look forward to the upcoming Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. And I wish the Games would be a complete success.



Terry Crossman gives a bottle of water to a visitor at the Lotus Market in the Shichahai area, Xicheng district, Beijing, on April 20, 2018. [Photo by Du Lianyi/China Daily]

About the interviewee



Terry Crossman sits in the volunteer box at the Lotus Market. [Photo/Xinhua]

Terry Crossman, 66, also known as Gao Tianrui, is an American expat who has lived in Beijing for 26 years. At a young age, Terry studied traditional Chinese classics such as Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzi and was captivated by Chinese culture. After living in Hong Kong and Singapore, he settled down in a Beijing hutong and enjoys his life here very much.

He has been called "Xicheng Dama" since 2017 after becoming the first foreign security volunteer in Xicheng district in Beijing. "Xicheng Dama" refers to a group of volunteers who roam Xicheng district acting as public security volunteers, most of which are women in their 50s and 60s.

Fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese and English, he frequently helps tourists.

Terry is also a winter sports lover. He played ice hockey in childhood, joined skiing team at high school and continues to ski in his adulthood.

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